

The Orchid Conservation Alliance
564 Arden Drive
Encinitas, CA 92024



The April 2016 Orchids in the Wild trip to France

France was magnifique. French people, French hotels, French wine, French food (Croissants! Baguettes!), French cheese, French trains, French busses, French sea coast, French river gorges, French Chateaux, French cliff dwellings, French viaducts, French medieval villages, and even ... wait for it ... FRENCH ORCHIDS. Yes, 13 genera, 39 species. One of the *Orchis simia* was even glad to see us! OCA member Nancy Benay put in a lot of work organizing this trip and I can't thank her enough for all the organizing she did, calling on more than 50 years of experience travelling in France. Nancy even induced several members of the French orchid society with special expertise in Provence's orchids to accompany us. Read on to get the details from my diary.



Orchis simia

Friday, April 22: While waiting for the train from Charles de Gaulle airport to Avignon I had my first of many baguette sandwiches, just butter and ham. Even in a big train station the food was good. I noticed that no one was smoking. My stereotypic expectation was that all French people would be smoking Gauloise cigarettes and muttering "*La vie es de la merde.*" I miss you, Jean Paul Belmondo. The TGV, a bullet train, was a very comfortable ride, whether first or second class, and after one stop somewhere and a ride averaging 118 mph it got to Avignon about 4PM. Outside the train windows the fields were either that intense spring green or very yellow with canola flowers. It was definitely early spring. Some trees were just leafing out while others were covered in white flowers. Under a blue sky with puffy white clouds the fields and forests were stunning. Soon Nancy Benay showed up with the bus we used for most of the trip, I met Jaouad our driver, and we were whisked off to the Hotel de la Murette (Hotel of the Mute) in the old section of Arles. Dinner at Le Grillon (The Cricket) was, for me, the local fish soup and a salad, both delicious, just across the street from the local coliseum. Apparently there are no more lions, but they still have bull fights; non-lethal, but still a bull fight. It must actually be France.

Saturday, April 23: It was time to find an orchid. Our bus was too large to be allowed into the old part of Arles, where our hotel was, so getting to the bus we walked through the very fine Saturday morning market. Cheese, bread, pastry, sausage, fish, carrots, tomatoes, peppers, olive oils, and so much more; I almost didn't make it to the bus before it left.



We drove about an hour to the southeast, finally arriving at L'Etang de Bolmon. An Etang is a pond, and L'Etang de Bolmon is a part of the much larger L'Etang de Berre, just northwest of Marseille. In

a parking lot there we were met by Annie and Michel Pinaud. This couple have been documenting and following many French native orchid sites for years as members of the regional branch of the French Orchid Society and they made an excellent guiding team, here and also later in our tour. After just a few minutes walk through the woods, there it was, my first ophrys, *Ophrys lutea*. At this site we saw *Ophrys lutea*, *Oph. bertolonii*, *O. scolopax*, *Serapias vomeracea*, and *Serapias parviflora* along with quite a number of non-orchid flowers. (Note that I have filed a more complete gallery of images on our website.) The *Oph. Lutea* sometimes occurred in patches of hundreds of plants, while the others were not so common.



The trail at L'Etang de Bolon going past a patch of *Ophrys lutea*. Note the stony, calcareous ground which these plants require.



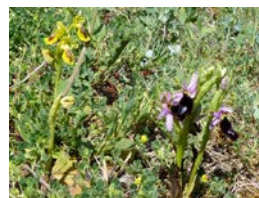
The terrain with L'Etang de Bolon in the rear. Purple flowers in the foreground are thyme.



Ophrys bertolonii



Ophrys lutea



*O. lutea and
bertolonii*



Serapias vomeracea

For lunch we had brought sandwiches from a shop in Arles. We drove to our next station of exploration, a 'Boucle Botanique,' or botanical circle, just to the west of the village of Carro. Here we were within earshot of the Mediterranean and enjoyed a very nice picnic which we had bought at a deli in Arles. The coast itself was very rocky with no sand in sight.



Gary Yonggee and Roger Sawkins enjoy the view at our Mediterranean lunch site.

After lunch we began to explore the area. Lesson 1 was to understand the difference between *Oph. scolopax* and *Oph. pseudoscolopax*. I didn't get good comparable photos; the ones you see here are from Gary Yonggee. (Gary has an excellent orchid image web site at www.yonggee.name;

It is well worth a visit.) We were told that the principal difference is not the patterning of the lip, which can vary quite a lot within individuals of both genera, but rather the openness of the *pseudoscolopax* lip as opposed to the recurved edges of the *scolopax* lip. It is easier to see that from behind and underneath, but, alas, I didn't get an image from that perspective. Note – this is why you get experts such as Annie and Michel Pinaud to accompany you. We also saw *Oph. speculum* and more *Oph. bertolonii* at this site



Ophrys scolopax

Gary Yong Gee



Ophrys pseudoscolopax

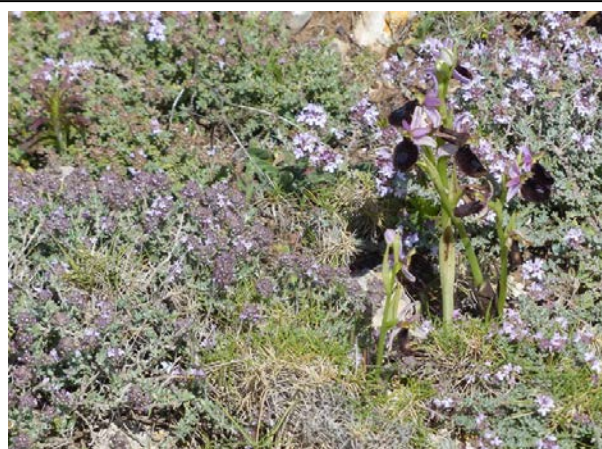
Gary Yong Gee



Ophrys speculum

I must confess that I was very taken with this site. At home we have had a spice grinder filled with “Herbs de Provence” that we use for many meals. Standing there in the sunshine, I could smell the same scent in the breeze. There was so much thyme, rosemary, and lavender just growing wild that the air was heavily scented, and on this beautiful day in amongst those herbs, there were wild orchids! It doesn't get much better than that.

Leaving Carro and the Boucle de Botanique, we went for a quick visit to Lavéra. On a hillside with sparse grass under pines we saw three more ophrys, *Oph. splendida*, *passionis*, and *provincialis*, as well as several hybrids.



Ophrys speculum between patches of wild thyme.



Ophrys splendida



Ophrys passionis



Ophrys provincialis



Probably
pseudoscolopax x
provincialis

When I take pictures of orchids I keep a running list of the plants' identities in my trip diary, but my list keeping sometimes runs behind and I get confused. To help I purchased "Orchidees de Genova à Barcelona" by Rémy Souchet from the couple accompanying us, which they recommend as an orchid guide for this region. I brought home several extra copies, which are for sale from the OCA at \$40 a copy; this includes shipping anywhere in the US and is essentially our cost.

We ate dinner at L'Apostrophe, a very pleasant place in Arles to which we could walk from the hotel.

Sunday, April 24: This day we drove east to Le Muy and nearby Puget-sur-Argens to the Var, about 60 miles NE of Marseilles, to visit several "stations d'orchidées" that are located in very different habitats including dry pine forests, grass fields, wet areas, and just behind a trailer park. Our guide for the day was Pierre-Michel Blais. The plan included a visit to the Abbaye de Thoronet, a Cistercian abbey built in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. However, we were so occupied with orchids that the abbey got skipped.

Our first stop was a relatively high elevation dry pine forest; high in this case being about 1000' above sea level. The orchids were quite different here from the previous day; they included *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Anacamptis* (or *Orchis*) *picta* and *laxiflora*, (of which I do not have good pictures from here) as well as *Serapias lingua* and *laxiflora*.

At this site there was a single *Ophrys splendida* very near the shoulder of the road. *Ophrys* typically grow only in calcareous soils, such as the soil we found during the previous day along the shore. Here, at higher elevation under the dry pine forest we were on hills formed of volcanic rock, rich in iron rather than calcium. So how was the *ophrys* growing here? As explained by Pierre-Michel, the fill for the road had been hauled in from a lower elevation, where the rock was calcium rich limestone, giving this plant the substrate it needs. We were at least ten miles from any place where *ophrys* normally grow, yet seed was blown here on the wind, creating this tiny *ophrys* outpost.



Dinner at L'Apostrophe. Left to right, Sue Fouquette, Lisa Harrison, Brenda Ward, Roger Sawkins, Gary Yong Gee, Kay Klumb, Christina Holenda, Eric Holenda, Renata Schmidt, Charley Fouquette, Bethany Drehman, and Nancy Benay.



Serapias lingua



Serapias vomeracea

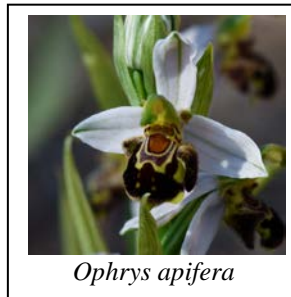


Serapias vomeracea in the pines

Later on Sunday, we covered several stations, all in piney grasslands; seeing more *Ophrys splendida*, also *aranifera* and *apifera*, *Serapias cordigera*, a field of *Anacamptis picta*, and several leaf rosettes of *Spiranthes autumnalis*, which will bloom in the fall. Note that the *A. picta* images are much bluer than their true color, which was lavender.



Ophrys aranifera



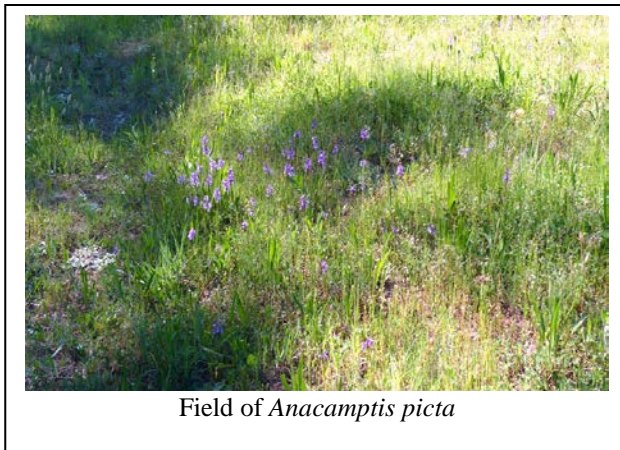
Ophrys apifera



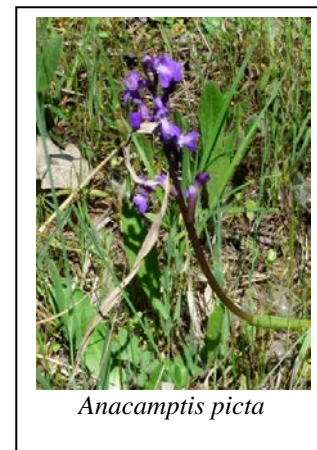
Serapias cordigera



Spiranthes autumnalis



Field of *Anacamptis picta*



Anacamptis picta

Monday, April 25: Our first stop was about 25 miles east of Arles, at Colline de la Cabre, a regional park on top of a very rocky, calcareous hill. However, I haven't said anything about breakfast at Hotel de la Murette. In short, it comes highly recommended, by me. Of course, any breakfast, in France or anywhere, that features high quality croissants is going to get good marks from me. Lots of other good breads, jams, ham, cheese, and tarts. The egg cooker was amusing. It was a bath of near boiling water into which one hung a small wire basket spoon that held an egg. The spoons were color coded, so you knew which spoon you had put into the bath and could time how long your egg had cooked to get it just the way you wanted it. The amusing part was that the eggs often floated up off the spoons, so that when you fished out an egg it might have been cooking two minutes or ten. The only way to know for sure was to open it and see how cooked it was. Of course, with a pencil anyone could have marked 'their' egg, but none of us were that clever!

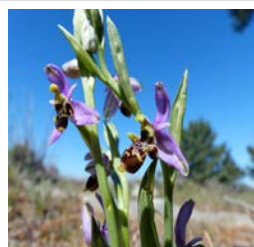
The day was blustery and chilly on top of Colline de la Cabre. All of my previous orchid trips have been to the tropics and the need to wear a warm coat when hunting orchids was new to me, but the day did eventually warm up. Except for the temperature, the day was perfect, bright sun, blue sky, puffy white clouds, lots of orchids.



A cold morning hunting orchids; Colline de la Cabre



Ophrys lutea



Ophrys scolopax



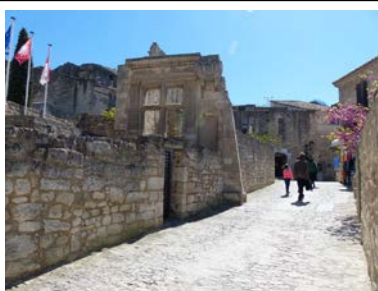
Orchis pyramidalis



Ophrys scolopax

Here we saw some of the same *Ophrys* sp. We had seen earlier and also the first *Orchis pyramidalis*. In the videos I took you can clearly see the orchids being whipped around by the breeze.

After our picnic lunch we said good-bye to Annie and Michel Pinaud, our guides. We were headed west, to do some non-orchid sight seeing. Our goal was Les Baux de Provence. France holds an annual competition to find the twenty most scenic villages of the country; Les Baux de Provence is one of these. It is an almost impossibly quaint little hill village with a castle/fort overlooking a tributary valley of the Rhone. There are many such castles in France, built for self-defense and control of the surrounding countryside. While some of our party went to a cave to see an animated presentation of Marc Chagall's work, I went up to the castle to see the view and the reconstructed medieval siege weapons on display. Some part of me is still only ten years old and loves to imagine flinging large flaming objects over walls, while ignoring the pain and havoc that resulted. On the way to the top a store selling nothing but espadrilles caught my eye. My wife Kathi is a big fan of espadrilles and I thought it would be cool to bring her home a pair. However, since I don't know her shoe size and would be a fool to try to guess both her size and what style she would like, I gave up the notion when I learned that even on sale they were well over \$100. At the fort a woman was demonstrating blacksmithing. Somehow I doubt that women were blacksmiths in the 14th century, but my daughters would approve of the idea.



Entering Les Baux de Provence



Espadrilles



The castle/fort on the hilltop.



The view from the fort



The blacksmith



A trebuchet

On the way home we made a quick stop at a lavender museum. There was a movie showing how lavender is grown, harvested, and the fragrance distilled. However, the most important concept transmitted to us was that most commercial lavender is actually lavandine, rather than lavender. Lavendine has a stronger, coarser odor with few of the health benefits of True French Lavender. And then there was a gift shop with many things made from True French Lavender; many stocking stuffers were purchased to be stuffed into stockings next Christmas. How many of you get True French Lavender ? Do you even know ? The museum had a wonderful large room full of old lavender oil stills, or alembics.



An antique alembic

Tuesday, April 26: Last night was our last night in Arles and today was to be a long day. The Hotel de la Muette kindly prepared our breakfast for 6AM and we were on the road by 7:30.

We are eventually headed to the Perigord region, but it is a long way to the west. We'll spend the night in Barjac at the Mas Escombelle Hotel. The accommodations there include some typical French countryside hotel rooms and several yurts. Inasmuch as we mostly fill the hotel, I stay in a yurt. The yurt was very comfortable, but the bathroom was about 30 yards away and it was a dark night; the bush beside the door is now a little greener than it was.

But I get ahead of myself. To break up the morning's drive we stopped at Nancy Benay's cousin's house about 20km west of Pont St. Esprit. It is a stone house on the side of a hill with sunny and shady habitats providing space for quite a few species of orchids. These included *Orchis simian*, *O. purple*, *O. ustellata*, *Cephalanthera damasiana*, *Limodorum abortivum*, *Limodorum sp.*, *Platanthera sp.*, and *Ophrys pseudoscolopax*.



Eric Holanda at work



Orchis purple



Limodorum abortivum



Inside my yurt

In the afternoon we visited a Neolithic cave paintings of Chauvet. home to many caves with Neolithic art. be the most famous, it is difficult for groups passing through because advance purchase available on the web. Lascaux dates from ago. Chauvet dates from 36,000 years ago. paintings were created 36,000 years ago is The Parthenon was constructed about 2500 less than 1/10 the age of these paintings. had none of the conveniences of artists created works of art as clearly lifelike as They made their own brushes, they made painted on a rock surface by the light of a paintings survived 36,000 years! Neolithic perspective and how to show motion, something modern artists didn't rediscover until the Renaissance, about 500 years ago.



Horses in Chauvet Cave

reproduction of the Southern France is While Lascaux may to visit who are just of tickets are not about 23,000 years To me, that cave almost unfathomable. years ago, thus it is The artists of Chauvet today, yet they anything modern. their own paint, they grease lamp, and the artists understood

Wednesday, April 27: Wednesday was a travel day, but we passed through some amazing places, especially as we drove south-west through the gorge of the Tarn river. The road here is overhung by cliffs so much so that the driver checked with the highway department before he risked taking his bus through the gorge. In medieval days the Tarn was a major highway with toll



Gorge of the Tarn with ruins of a medieval castle.

booths, or castles, every so often. In the exceptionally picturesque village of St. Enemie we found a faux Frenchman eating lunch.

We finished our drive in Carsac-Aillac, just outside of Sarlat at the Hotel Delpeyrat. During the afternoon we crossed the viaduct of Millau; a cable stayed bridge that spans the entire valley of the Tarn above the village of Millau, the capital of Roquefort cheese and glove making in France. At 1.5 miles long and 1120 feet high, it is truly an amazing bridge.

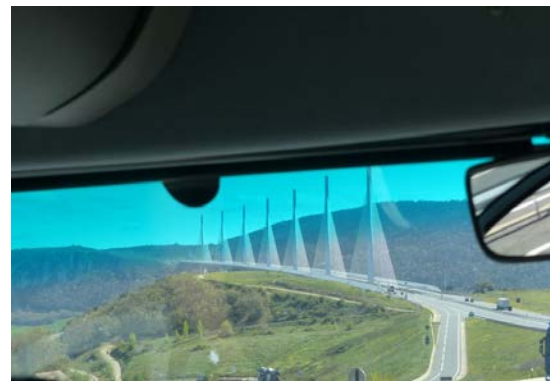
St. Enemie, Sarlat, and Beynac where we visited a little later in the trip, are all in the prestigious group of towns designated as 'The Most Beautiful Villages in France.' A competition is held every so often (annually ?) to designate these towns. The result is a very significant boost in tourism to the towns, which is good for their economies, if not their peace, quiet, and parking.



Entrance to historic St. Enemie



The Faux Frenchman lunches



The Millau viaduct

Thursday, April 28: Carsac-Aillac is a tiny little town a few kilometers from Sarlat. Carsac-Aillac seems to have one bakery, with excellent croissants and baguettes of course, one grocery store, with excellent cheap wine and fruit of course, one sweet shop with extravagantly huge meringues of course, and several cafes, with wonderful food of course. Sarlat is the capital of the Périgord, aka the Dordogne. The region is one of the most beautiful regions of France and rich in many ways. The history starts with Cro-Magnon man some 60,000 years ago; his skull was dug

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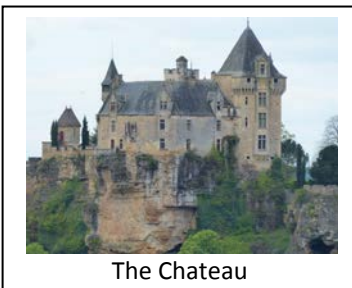
up in the Périgord. The area is full of art starting with prehistoric cave paintings, wonderful gastronomy, castles scattered all about, many wineries, walnut orchards along every country road, and seems to be the center of the foi gras industry. The clumps of scruffy looking oak trees are actually truffle plantations. And also, lots of orchids. We were very fortunate to be accompanied on several outings by Josiane Glaudon, a retired school principal, a friend of Nancy Benay's and a wealth of knowledge about the orchids, the truffles, and the history of the region.

Speaking of foi gras, the first morning some of us met with Brigitte Hauchecorne, who with her husband owns a small B&B where Nancy stayed on her 2015 exploratory trip to prepare for this OCA trip. Brigitte's custom is to make cans of pâté for her friends and family; she agreed to give us a practical lesson in pâté preparation. While the vegetarians and non-foi gras eaters went exploring for orchids along an abandoned railroad track the rest of us went to make pâté. This involved spicing the mixture of meats that the butcher had ground together and packing it into cans with the addition of either foi gras or hazelnuts. After we finished, Brigitte took the cans to the local hardware store to be sealed and then pressure cooked them for several hours. Before we left Carsac-Aillac we went back to Brigitte's, paid for the materials, and each brought several cans back to age properly, minimum of three months, in our pantries before tasting the results; that will be in August at the earliest. Stay tuned.



Sue Fouquette and Brenda Ward making pâté.

In the afternoon we went to visit Beynac, another of the 'Most Beautiful Villages' which sits on a bend in the Dordogne river with a large castle on the rock above the town. Getting to Beynac we stopped to admire the view of a large chateau from a bend in the road only to discover that at the bottom of the roadside embankment there was a pair of snakes. Clearly everyone was more interested in the snakes than the chateau – see photo below.



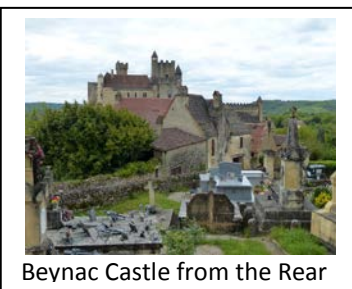
The Chateau



The Snakes



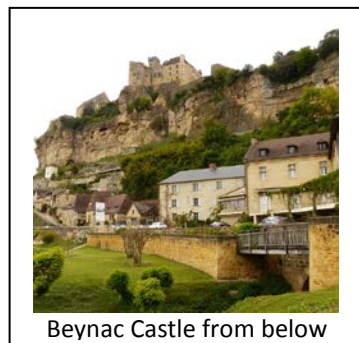
Snake Watching



Beynac Castle from the Rear



In Beynac Castle Courtyard



Beynac Castle from below

Beynac is as advertised, a very beautiful village. Unfortunately the weather was grey and overcast, but fortunately it didn't rain. The bus left us off on top of the hill where the castle is, which we visited. Building of the castle was begun in the early 12th century. Towards the end of that century, for ten years it was the property of Richard the Lion Hearted. Like most castles it was probably a cold and drafty place. I did learn what



Sword Storage.

knights did with their swords when they ate – see photo at right.

Back in Carsac-Aillac, before dinner, we went to see some orchids that the non-paté makers had discovered along the abandoned railroad track behind the hotel. In a 50 yard wide cove in the cliffs were quite a variety of orchids; *Ophrys insectifera*, *Listeria ovata*, *Aceras anthropomorphus*, and *Cephalanthera longifolia*, and, not shown below, *Ophrys pseudoscolopax* and *Orchis purpure*.



Aceras anthropomorphus



Ophrys insectifera



Listeria ovata



Cephalanthera longifolia

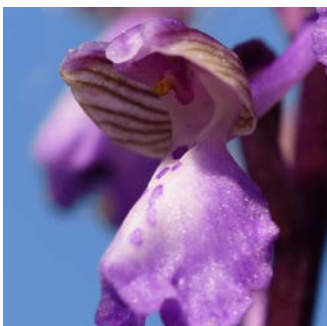
Friday, April 29: Friday was a beautiful day with lots and lots of orchids. We drove to the Chemin de Colle where we met Josiane Glaudon, the retired school principal whom I introduced earlier. The first site was a sheep meadow on top of a gentle hill overlooking the valley of the Lezere river. When we met Josiane by the road, she said this was a special site where we were going to count the orchids. So, when I saw four *Orchis morio* spikes, I started counting. As we rounded a large bush and came into the pasture I realized that she was joking because there were thousands of *O. morio* spread across this meadow. In some places, exaggerating only slightly, the field was more purple than green; in some places there were also lots of *Ophrys sulcata*.



Orchis morio



Orchis morio with
Ophrys sulcata



Orchis morio



Orchis morio, normal and alba

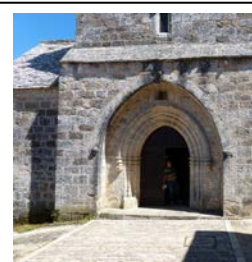


Ophrys sulcata

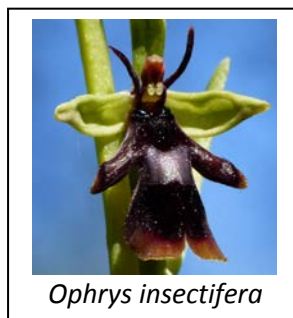
For lunch we went to the bar/café in Ladornac, Josiane's home village, which is even smaller than Carsac-Aillac in that it has the bar/café and that is it for commercial establishments. Ladornac is a very picturesque village, especially on this Friday in spring, when the sky was perfectly blue and the lilacs, the redbud, the wisteria, the daffodils, and some early red poppies were all in bloom. After lunch we visited a beautifully restored 12th century church, following which we strolled through the village, ending up at a forest plot outside of town where Josiane has created an orchid reserve for visitors to come and learn about orchids. There are many signs identifying the orchids. Among others we saw here *Ophrys insectifera*, an unusual double *Ophrys aranifera*, and a hybrid of *Orchis purpure x militaris*.



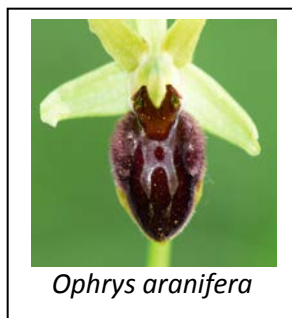
Ladornac lilac



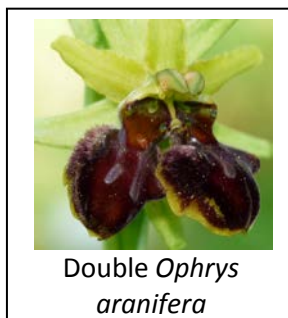
Ladornac Church



Ophrys insectifera



Ophrys aranifera

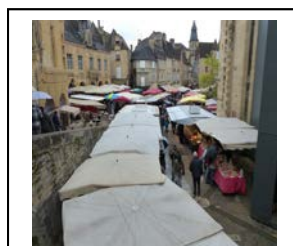


Double *Ophrys aranifera*



Medieval Sculpture over Church Door

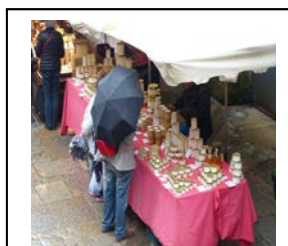
Saturday, April 30: Saturday was market day in Sarlat and pretty much the place to be for anyone within 100 miles despite the rain showers. Cheese, sausage, vegetables, walnuts, foie gras, and bread. Also shirts, belts, shoes, purses, hats, bracelets, mugs, and even furniture refinishing. Sarlat is famous for its market. The town itself is medieval and renaissance in the old center, with a more modern surrounding town. They even have a (memorial ?) bronze statue of the geese that have contributed their livers; hopefully having my picture taken with them will insure me against the effects on my heart of eating some foie gras. By mid afternoon the rain was a steady downpour so we retreated to the hotel for a quiet evening.



Sarlat Market Ready for Rain



Bread Stall



Foie Gras Stall



Goose Memorial

Sunday, May 1: It hardly seems possible that we could see still more orchids, but the last day of the trip was another orchid home run. We met Josiane Glaudon again at Le Manoir de Eyrinac. The main attraction for most people here is the formal topiary garden and one sees ads for this garden all over the countryside. For us, the main attraction was a lightly forested area just on the other side of the parking lot, not really a part of the manor grounds, where sunny and shady areas provided habitats for lots of the native orchids. I have pictured already most of the orchids we saw, which included *Cephalanthera damasoniana*, *Limodorum abortivum*, *Orchis pyramidalis*,



Lim. abortivum



Orchis pyramidalis



Ophrys scolopax



Neottia avis-nidus

Ophrys scolopax, *Neottia nidus-avis*, *Orchis ustulata*, *Ophrys insectifera*, and *Listeria ovate*. The *Neottia* is a saprophyte, entirely without chlorophyll. It was a great last orchid morning and lunch in the gardens' café was good too, although very expensive. Many thanks to Josiane Glaudon for her exceptional help.

Sunday afternoon we drove to La Roque Saint-Christophe. This is a 55,000 year old cliff dwelling on the banks of the Vézère river, a tributary of the Dordogne. Although probably not continuously occupied for 55,000 years, there is evidence that it was occupied that long ago. It was not finally abandoned until the 20th century. Since medieval times there has been extensive use of caves as dwellings, often times with constructed fronts to keep out the weather. In France, such dwellings are called troglodyte homes. Sometimes they form entire villages, but village or home, they are fun to visit.

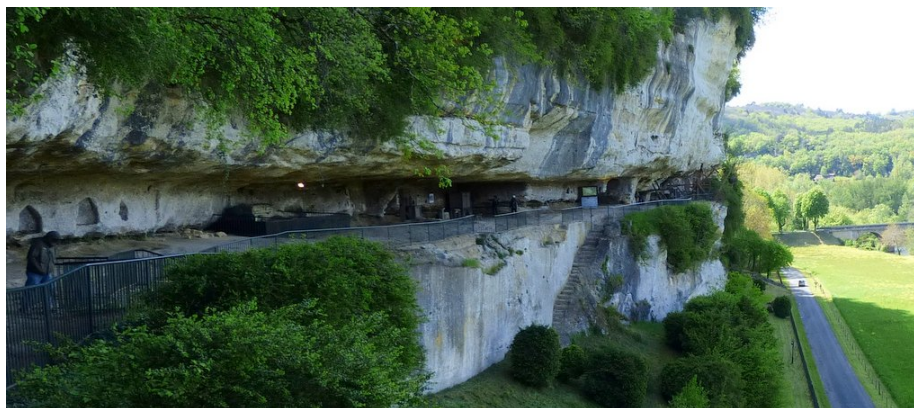
Back at the hotel it was time to tell stories, have a last dinner, and pack to leave for home or continue on individual trips in Europe.

My notes list that we saw 39 species in 13 genera. Many of the species and some of the genera are unique to France and Europe. In Ecuador, for example, one could very likely see more species and genera in a single day, but, frankly, the croissants are better in France.

Many thanks to all the participants who made this such an enjoyable trip. I have also to single out Nancy Benay for thanks. She spent a great deal of time, money, and effort to arrange this trip which I cannot imagine anyone else doing. Nancy loves France and her cheerful enthusiasm during this whole enterprise was as much a pleasure to see as any of the orchids.



Josiane Glaudon and Nancy Benay admire some *Limodora*



A fraction of La Roque Saint Christophe

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